

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE **A-19**

WASHINGTON POST
15 September 1985

Change in Bill May Help Contras

Ban on Aid From Third Countries Was Eased at Last Minute

By Robert Parry
Associated Press

The Reagan administration engineered a last-minute change in the new foreign aid law that apparently allows it to reach an "understanding" with other countries to ship military aid to rebels fighting the government of Nicaragua, U.S. government officials say.

Congressional Democrats who accepted the behind-the-scenes change shortly before the law's enactment now say they were unaware that several U.S. allies reportedly had cleared with the White House their plans to send military aid to the counterrevolutionaries, also called contras.

Various sources close to the rebels have said assistance has come from Israel, South Korea, Taiwan, Guatemala, Honduras and Venezuela.

Those "third-country" shipments have helped the contras sustain their war against Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government despite the congressional cutoff of Central Intelligence Agency aid in 1984, according to private and government sources close to the rebels.

The White House and the State Department said they had no com-

ment on the change in the aid provision. Government officials and other sources spoke about it on condition they not be identified by name.

Some congressional aides said they now believe the administration's tacit approval of the "third-country" shipments might have conflicted with the foreign aid bill's original language.

The change in the bill's language came in an unusual parliamentary move after House and Senate negotiators had finished work July 26 on the measure, which provides \$12.7 billion in assistance worldwide and \$27 million in nonlethal aid to the Nicaraguan rebels.

When the conference ended, the bill contained language stating: "The United States . . . shall enter into no understanding, either formal or informal, under which a recipient of U.S. economic or military assistance . . . shall provide assistance of any kind to" the contras.

Earlier, Rep. Benjamin A. Gilman (R-N.Y.) had told the negotiators that President Reagan might veto the bill if the wording were not changed.

Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), the author of the original language, said

he then agreed to revise the language, replacing the ban against any "understanding" with a prohibition against any White House promise to give a third country military aid in exchange for helping the contras. Pell said he believes the two versions "really say the same thing."

One State Department official said the administration was concerned that the Pell language would "take away from the sovereign decisions" of other countries to aid the contras.

A Republican congressional aide said State Department officials felt the original language would have "hampered" administration plans and might have blocked the White House from talking to countries about providing nonlethal aid to the contras.

The aide said the change would appear to allow the administration to solicit military aid for the rebels from friendly governments as long as the flow of U.S. assistance to those countries is not used to coerce their help. The final language bars any "arrangement conditioning, expressly or impliedly" for U.S. aid to a country in exchange for its helping the contras.